Hey City Council, leave those kids alone!

by Free Press Staff

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A Hilliard City Council member aligned with "America First" is now linked to a serious. privacy breach of Hilliard students.

When the vice president of Hilliard's City Council, Republican Omar Tarazi, recently requested all disciplinary records of Hilliard City School students over the previous five years, he was accidentally also sent the students' identities, roughly 4,200 names, a serious privacy violation to say the least.

Especially when you consider the data was copied to school board members and that Councilmember Tarazi admitted to forwarding the data to "a number of others who were similarly interested in looking at the data," as he told the *Columbus Dispatch*. Hilliard is increasingly becoming one of Central Ohio's most diverse suburbs.

One serious question is, did Tarazi send the data to politically like-minded friends (some MAGA?), and did these friends then do the same?

One parent whose child's discipline records were exposed – a parent who identifies as a progressive – told the *Free Press*, "It bothers me that my kid's data" is in the hands of people "who despise me."

In 2021, showing his ambition for higher office, Tarazi ran for Congress in the Republican primary to represent Ohio's 15th district. It was a special election after Steve Stivers resigned. But Tarazi made a poor showing winning just over 900 votes and finishing a distant 9th out of ten candidates.

He campaigned on being "a principled conservative servant leader" and by all indications stands firmly with the "America First" crowd.

Tarazi, an attorney who was appointed to Hilliard City Council in 2019, made the public-information request for disciplinary records back in February. He asked that no names be sent with the data.

"This data breach represents a stunning act of incompetence on the part of the district administration and should have never happened," Tarazi told the *Dispatch*.

Some Hilliard parents are asking: Why was the request for disciplinary records made in the first place?

Hilliard City Council and the school board are collaborating on research projects, said Tarazi in an email to the *Free Press*.

The Hilliard school district over the previous five years has required students to complete annual DEI and SEL surveys – DEI means "Diversity, Inclusion and Equity", and SEL stands for "Social Emotional Learning." Both surveys strive to capture or measure what the students are feeling, or their perceptions. For instance, how much effort does the district put into addressing issues of fairness and inclusion?

Tarazi said the Hilliard DEI survey is "focused on fighting racism." Something some Hilliard parents told the *Free Press* is not a problem in these schools, but other parents say a small number of white students are still using the "N" word to verbally assault minority students, or the "F" word to attack LGBTQ students.

"Both the survey results, and the district discipline records show there really isn't a racism problem between students in terms of race-based fighting," responded Tarazi to the *Free Press*. "In fact, there are more cases of students bringing knives and weapons to school than cases of ethnic intimidation/harassment, and student's survey results relating to having friends from different racial/ethnic/cultural backgrounds scored very high."

Tarazi added these "well-being surveys" the district has invested in are not helping the students in any substantive way and could be having a negative effect on their academics.

Nonetheless, a growing number of parents whose kids' discipline records were exposed – which also included any documented disability status – are taking serious pause and considering legal action. Besides Tarazi's apparent need to know who's behaving badly and why, how could the district, even when its legal advisors apparently vetted the data, could make such a mistake?

"First I received an email from the school that totally downplayed it," said one parent who requested we not use their name out of concern for retaliation against their kids, which reflects the ideological polarization ongoing in Central Ohio suburbs.

"There's information in there about my kid," continued the unnamed parent. "I'm upset more that Tarazi turned around and sent it to other people. This could affect my child moving forward because this information is in the hands of a lot of people now, and this is what Hilliard [the district] is downplaying."

This parent believes Tarazi requested the data to push his "America First" beliefs onto the students. What makes this situation more head-scratching is that Tarazi is a Muslim.

"He wants to make the argument, but there's no validity to this, that Social Emotional Learning does not work," they said. "This teaches kids how to be kind to other people. It's important. It changed my child."

But Tarazi and his allies believe it's brainwashing liberalism, said the parent.

"They don't want it in the schools. They don't want any books dealing with race or ethnicity," they said. "They call it 'Critical Race Theory.' I call it 'Truth in Education.'"

Which comes back to this parent's and others' serious issue they have with Tarazi.

"Why are you City Councilmen in the middle of this? This isn't your job. You're mixing your roles. As a City Council person Tarazi's role is to represent everybody in the city of Hilliard," they said.

"The million-dollar question is, who created the data set and who approved it to go out?" they asked.

Hilliard school district spokesperson Stacie Raterman told the *Free Press*, "Within an hour we began working with our attorney to investigate this situation."

"There was no disclosure of social security numbers, birthdays, addresses, or phone numbers," she said.

Making mistakes is part of life's imperfections, said another impacted parent who also wished to remain anonymous.

"But now the rightwing crazies, who love to think they and their kids are perfect, are reveling in my kids so-called imperfections," they said.

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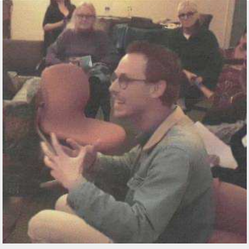

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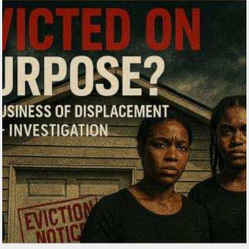

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